

Soccer flashpoint

THERE COULD NOT have been a happier man in amateur football than Dave Thomas, on Saturday afternoon, when at precisely 4.31 p.m. he headed Wycombe Wanderers' winner at Ilford. For a split second he stopped and stood with his arms aloft facing the Wanderers' contingent behind the goal, in a pose, which more or less indicated "What about that then?"

In its own simple way Thomas' action was a symbolic and moving gesture to a crowd who have continually barracked him since the beginning of the season.

The Dave Thomas issue is one of the hottest controversies to rage round the Lookers Park terraces in recent years.

Sadly inconsistent Thomas, at times, appears yards slow and I feel he has not yet made the transition in this thinking from Athenian to Isthmian standard.

I would be the first to admit that Thomas is not, by any stretch of the imagination, the most gifted player to don a Wanderers' shirt.

No excuse

However, that is no excuse for the continual flow of abuse that rains down on him while a game is in progress. It is not good-natured barracking but cold and calculated to throw the player completely out of his stride.

It is ironic to ponder that this irresponsibility shown by a small section of the crowd can do nothing but damage to Wanderers' cause. After all, once picked, Thomas is a member of the



DAVE THOMAS . . .
time to stop the abuse
about him

team and if his confidence is undermined, therefore causing him to play indifferently, the burden is greater on his ten colleagues.

I fully appreciate that the crowd wish to register a protest about his selection and this type of criticism is the only form of action open to them. But it is just not enough to punish the player publicly in every game, the matter should be brought home with resounding force to Manager-coach Barry

Stop hounding Thomas

says PATRICK VERCOE

Darvill, and the selection committee.

Obviously, Thomas has been aware of the criticism and it is to his credit that he has withstood the mental pressures to keep playing. On the majority of occasions, when things have gone wrong, Thomas has had to bear a large chunk of 'mud-slinging' when not all the blame is to be laid entirely at his feet.

Campaign

I am not defending Thomas as a player — personally speaking, he would not be in my side — but the man is a human being and it is therefore to be realised that the hate campaign which has been heaped upon him would inevitably make it difficult, if

not impossible for him to reach anything like his true form.

At times the crowd are just waiting to pounce on the minutest of mistakes. On Saturday, at Ilford, it reached a new and absurd state of affairs. Thomas was being blamed for not contesting a ball, pushed some twenty yards in front of him, with two home-defenders just waiting five yards away to snuff out the danger. Even the maestro of the pro ranks, Bobby Charlton, would think twice before bothering to move to that kind of pass.

Whatever the fans may think of Dave Thomas' calibre as a player, no one on a football field anywhere in the world deserves to be hounded throughout 90 minutes.